



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

SUMMER 2020

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Strengthening Local Food Systems

By Cindy M. Sabato

Early one May morning, a Maola Dairy delivery truck took an unusual turn through the gates and into the parking lot of the Fauquier Community Food Bank. Nearby, Director Sharon Ames' excitement was palpable as she jumped up and down, hands clapping, smile as wide as the gates swung open that day. Since the coronavirus pandemic, Ames said the food bank has had to turn away families in search of milk more often than they've been able to provide it.

Food bank staffer Cindi Carter shared Ames' enthusiasm. "Today, I'm excited for the clients. I'm excited to see their faces when we tell them we're gonna have milk for them. At the end of the day, you know you've done something good." That's exactly what The Piedmont Environmental Council was trying to do when we hatched a plan to match up unsellable local milk with the people who needed it most.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, school nutrition programs have been shut down for months, leaving local dairy farmers with nowhere to sell their milk and more than 25 percent of northern Piedmont schoolchildren, who relied on school for two and sometimes

three healthy meals a day, now needing to be fed at home. And a lot of folks have lost jobs and wages. Not surprisingly, food banks all over the region have experienced big increases in the demand for—and shortages of—fresh produce, meat, meals, and milk.

"Part of PEC's core mission is protecting working farms, and we've been additionally focused on local food systems for the past 15 years. We saw an opportunity that PEC was uniquely able to take on—raise philanthropic support to buy milk from local farmers and donate it to our local food pantries," said Matt Coyle, PEC's Buy Fresh Buy Local coordinator.

Most family farms in Fauquier County and the surrounding region send their milk to be processed by the Maryland and Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association and distributed under the Co-op's Maola brand. PEC's long-time conservation partner, Ken Smith, a fourth-generation dairy farmer at Cool Lawn Farm in Remington, asked the cooperative to adjust some of its processing, delivery and staffing operations to make the shift from schools to food pantries. Meanwhile, our conversations with the Fauquier



First milk delivery from Maola Dairy. Pictured from left to right: Andrew Platt, Rappahannock County Food Pantry; Cindi Carter and Tom Baccei, Fauquier Community Food Bank; Matt Coyle, PEC; Sharon Ames, FCFB; Kenny Smith, Cool Lawn Farm. Photo by Marco Sánchez

Community Food Bank and with Rappahannock Food Pantry suggested the need was about 250 gallons of milk a week. We set a \$10,000 goal for roughly 250 gallons of milk for about 10 weeks.

PATH Foundation enthusiastically provided a \$5,000 challenge grant to inspire support among other potential donors. "Before we knew it, we'd surpassed our goal of \$10,000. And on Thursday, May 21, Maola delivered the first 140 gallons to Fauquier Community Food Bank and 60 gallons to Rappahanock

Food Pantry," Coyle said.

Media coverage about the initiative generated a new wave of philanthropic support, from the Northern Piedmont Community Foundation and others, totaling more than \$45,000. Now, we're providing more than 800 gallons of milk per week to 14 additional food pantries. They are: FISH and Community Touch food pantries in Fauquier County; Seven Loaves, Tree of Life, Loudoun Hunger Relief, and Dulles South food pantries in Loudoun County; Christ Church Cares Pantry in Clarke

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Planning for Access

As the onset of Covid-19 social-distancing coincided with beautiful spring weather, many Piedmont residents turned to natural areas, parks, trails and even rural roads, enjoying what we all know to be certain: these places sustain us, provide respite and serve as our oasis.

But as Piedmont Environmental Council President Chris Miller pointed out in a *Virginia Mercury* op-ed, something else became abundantly clear this spring: We need more, well-distributed public access to parks and green spaces all throughout the region.

Even without a pandemic, research shows that access to nature not only improves individual health, but also the health of our communities. These spaces are a key to thriving communities. Moms and dads, kids and dogs, friends and family, runners and walkers and bikers alike benefit from local public access to trails, parks, and open spaces, close to home. There are other co-benefits as well: improved water quality from forest buffers along streams and

rivers, habitat for wildlife, and tree canopy that provides shade and reduces temperatures in urban areas.

PEC supporters are accessing many such places during this time, and we share with you their thoughts on why these green spaces are so critical:

Nora Seilheimer

"This pandemic has turned our spring, typically a very busy time for a family with school-aged kids, into a time without schedules or places to be. Every weekend, we choose a different Albemarle County park to enjoy, like Mint Springs,



Hikers take in the view at PEC's Piedmont Memorial Overlook. Photo by Marco Sánchez

Ragged Mountain, Walnut Creek, Bynum Preserve or Preddy Creek. For my family, it has been a great opportunity to be together, enjoy nature and get some exercise. We have all appreciated having so many options, all within a short drive or walk. We are thankful for the work of PEC and its partner organizations for advocating for more parks with greater connectivity within Charlottesville and Albemarle."

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Support PEC

Make a donation or get in touch with PEC at:

Post Office Box 460
Warrenton, VA 20188
540.347.2334
pec@pecva.org

Or visit:
www.pecva.org

Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!



Pushing for Transparency

By Dan Holmes

Obviously, a lot has changed since March, when you last received a copy of the Piedmont View. Soon after, shut-down orders went into place and, like me, you might have felt like you were trapped in a bad episode of *The Twilight Zone*. Suddenly, any trip outside of the house came with a risk analysis. Adjustments like teleworking, or worse, changes in employment status, disrupted normal routines. Things we may have taken for granted, like access to schools and daycare, visits with elderly relatives and yes, even toilet paper, were off the table. Clearly, these have not been normal times. But that wasn't always evident looking at local government agendas.

Localities across the commonwealth wrestled with how to continue operations during a declared state of emergency. Further complicating matters, the governor's initial stay-at-home order went through June 10, placing limits on people's ability to engage in any public process. Given this, local governments raised important questions, including: 1) what issues should be addressed; 2) how do we provide a robust public process without in-person meetings; 3) what are the best technologies we can deploy; 4) how do we serve people without access to technology; and 5) how do we maintain an equitable

process for our citizens and businesses?

Early on, some of these questions were raised with Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring. In a March 20 opinion, the attorney general pointed to several sections of Virginia Code, including §15.2-1413, which allows a local government to enact an emergency ordinance during a disaster. Such an ordinance allows localities to do things like hold remote meetings and make decisions on non-essential issues, all during a period when the normal public process is suspended. However, and importantly, the attorney general's opinion included cautionary language stressing that localities should stick to issues and decisions that are "immediate and necessary."

Unfortunately, many localities used the broad language of §15.2-1413 to move forward with arguably non-essential decisions. These decisions included rezonings and special use permit proposals at a time when citizens were, at best, distracted, and at worst, unable to participate. And while we may be getting closer to some semblance of our prior lives, our local governments are still operating under continuity of government ordinances.

Although some localities and agencies are employing best practices



An Orange County Planning Commission Public Meeting on Zoom.

as they understand them and are largely sticking to the matters that are immediate and essential, none of this was or is being done in a consistent manner.

What has PEC been doing?

- We have written to the governor (twice) and other state leaders. We have asked them to address the inadequacies of the state code and to provide localities with guidance on best practices, including the importance of sticking to essential decisions, at least until the stay-at-home order was lifted or localities were not operating under an emergency ordinance.
- We have educated our communities and partners to the problems associated with the continuity of governance ordinances, including limits to participation for those who do not have internet due to their place of residence or economic situation, among others.
- We have tracked and commented on issues as localities pursued them,

engaged with citizens by email and phone, encouraging them to participate. We have also reminded these localities that their citizenry needs them to stick to essential matters while stay-at-home orders are in place or so long as local governments are operating under §15.2-1413.

As always, PEC strives to be there for you and your community, weighing in on important matters and providing you with the information necessary to stay engaged. We do this because, as you almost certainly know, what matters most to elected officials is hearing from their constituents directly.

Please reach out to your local PEC field representative by phone or email if you want to learn more or have questions on how your own local government is operating. We will continue to press for policies and changes to the state code that ensure we come out of the pandemic with an enhanced public process, making the best use of digital technologies and providing all of our citizens an opportunity to participate in their government.

Strengthening Local Food Systems

Continued from cover

County; Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, The Haven, Holy Comforter Food Pantry and Soup Kitchen, and Loaves and Fishes in Charlottesville; Buck Mountain Food Pantry and Coveseville Baptist Church Food Pantry in Albemarle County; Madison Emergency Service Agency in Madison County; and Blue Ridge Presbyterian Food Bank and Feeding Greene in Greene County.

"Our hope was that the initial effort would be a successful pilot program that could be expanded or replicated elsewhere, and that's exactly what is happening. We are thrilled by and grateful for our community's enthusiastic support of such an important effort when so many farmers and families are suffering," Coyle said.

But PEC President Chris Miller cautions that the initiative merely treats the symptom of a larger problem. "The coronavirus pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in our food supply chain and

illustrates the incredible value of strong, sustainable local food systems, not only for times like these, but also after the current crisis passes when consumers want access to more nutritious and more locally-produced food," he said.

Small, family-owned dairy farms are already operating on the edge of survival due to falling milk prices, as well as competition with milk alternatives and commercial-scale dairy operations. "Absent innovative approaches to the supply-chain issues revealed during the pandemic, many will not make it through this period. At the same time, with so much healthy food grown and produced right here in our own backyards, there is no reason people shouldn't be able to provide for the nutritional needs of their families with locally-produced food," Miller said, adding that while our communities are witnessing a dynamic community solution to a systemic problem, we need a more holistic solution in the long run.

"It is not a permanent solution for PEC to be in the middle of local food sourcing on a regular basis, but it's a testament of our place in the community that we could act swiftly and mobilize this effort in a single week," Miller said. "We hope this effort to connect local farms to local food supply needs will be a bridge to systemic change."

Community members interested in supporting this initiative should contact PEC's Development Advisor, Doug Larson, at dlarson@pecva.org or 540-347-2334, x7004.



Small, family-owned dairy farms are already operating on the edge of survival and the Covid-19 crisis has made business even more challenging. Photo by Tracy Lind

Rapid Response Local Food Initiatives During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has strained a great many elements that make up modern American society, including the nation's food supply chain. With school nutrition programs shut down, rising unemployment, and food supply shortages at the grocery store, the pandemic has significantly increased the need for fresh, healthy food within every community. In a rapid response, The Piedmont Environmental Council used the strength of our long-standing relationships with local farmers and funders to help with local food relief efforts.

At our **Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows**, we have accelerated our second year growing schedule to meet the rising need for fresh produce at Loudoun Hunger Relief. We expanded our garden from 1.3 acres to four acres and are working tirelessly in the fields to grow and donate more than 15,000 pounds of produce—even without the hundreds of volunteers we normally depend upon. Thanks to a new greenhouse, we started planting early and are already supplying a variety of greens four months earlier than last year. So far, we've donated 2,000 pounds of apples, 125 fresh herb plants, and 1,500 pounds of fresh beets, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, collards, kale, lettuce and swiss chard to 450 Loudoun households.

We are working with Loudoun County to develop the **Gilberts Corner Farm Market** as a central distribution point for local food. We successfully worked to keep the Gilberts Market open in the midst of Covid-19 shut-downs, so that residents can access local food there. Now, we are partnering with Loudoun Valley Homegrown Market Cooperative to make Gilberts Corner a food pickup location for Loudoun farmers and local consumers.

PEC is taking a lead within the **Virginia Buy Fresh Buy Local** network, working with partners at Virginia Cooperative Extension, to promote e-commerce options so that farmers can sell products directly to consumers online. In addition to a new online platform, an interactive, searchable map on our revamped buylocalpiedmont.org website will make it easier for consumers to find local food.

As the need for local food has skyrocketed during the pandemic, PEC has joined with long-time partner 4P Foods and Local Food Hub in support of a **Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition**. We have given them direct access to *Buy Fresh Buy Local* partners, helped mobilize laid-off local government and restaurant industry workers to staff a supply chain that is delivering nutrient-rich food to those who need it across D.C. and in Virginia and Maryland, and supporting the \$10M fundraising goal to make all of it possible.

Planning for Access

Continued from cover

Jimmy O'Connor

"My home borders Sugarland Run Stream Valley Park in Loudoun County.



Being nearby, I am easily able to go for a walk or mountain bike ride on the one-mile trail running the length of the park. This nearby access to the outdoors is important to me and my family, especially now that other places to be outside are not available. Being able to be move about outside, particularly along this shaded trail along a stream, is both mentally and physically rejuvenating. I can see the trail from my home office window and, based on the number of people using this trail, it is clear many others find benefit in this little local trail, too."

Queta Bond



"Sky Meadows has excellent trails from easy to difficult as well as a number of lovely vistas. One such trail is the Ambassador Whitehouse trail with informative PEC placards and a memorial to those that have played a role in saving scenic

venues. The extensive acreage of this park can accommodate many hikers, as well as provide the ability to "social distance." You can learn about chestnut tree recovery efforts, and there are several spaces/trails for children to learn about Virginia flora and fauna. The picnic tables and benches throughout the park provide spaces where a day out in the fresh air can be expanded into a restorative activity."

Mary Root



"During this pandemic, people living in and around Remington have taken to walking around Remington. There are lots of pleasant sights to see, and three Little Free Libraries and the Little Free Pantry to visit. We're also seeing bicyclists from other areas taking advantage of our four on-road bike trails which begin and end in Remington's downtown. Our downtown kiosk displays the bike trail map along with trail brochures and the historical walking tour. The Piedmont Environmental Council was a big help gaining these amenities, with strong backing for grants and many good ideas for implementation. It's nice to live in a small town with a caring community, and we appreciate the PEC's strong support."



Winny Buursink

"I have a great open space at home. With that I keep my sanity. As one of the volunteers responsible for the upkeep of the Arboretum in Rady Park, I get a lot of positive feedback from the folks that walk, jog, meditate, read a book, or meet friends in the park, and who clearly all need this open space. I am out there weeding and pruning so trees and plants are well taken care of. Making Rady Park, and especially the Arboretum, an inviting, relaxing and educational place gives me great satisfaction and motivates me to go to the park a couple of times a week."

Missy Janes



"Finding space where others are not and trying to stay closer to home, I walk the country roads. Thank goodness for the beautiful spring we have had and thank goodness for the peaceful beauty of conserved lands that flank many of our rural roads. I hope we can always keep them protected and work to provide more."

October Greenfield

"Having access to parks and open spaces, like Manassas National Battlefield, Sky Meadows, Merrimac Farm WMA or the

Conway-Robinson State Forest, is vital for one's mental and physical health. Sunshine and fresh air help me to decompress from everyday stress while getting exercise and appreciating the beauty of the small things around me. During the past few weeks, I have also greatly enjoyed watching people start to notice the birds and plants that often go unnoticed in their backyards."



What about you? Are there parks, trails or greenways that have been vital to you during Covid-19? Email pec@pecva.org if you'd like to highlight one that has been particularly valuable to you or your family.

It's important to remember that these places don't happen by accident. Parks, open space, trails and greenways distributed throughout local communities must be a goal for each and every town and county comprehensive plan; they must also be a regular, committed area of local and state capital investment.

During this time of "social distancing," please consider reaching out to your local elected officials to advocate with us for the creation, promotion, and protection of local, nearby parks and green spaces that you, your family and neighbors, and all in your community can easily access!

Many Ways to Give

Supporting PEC's work building strong communities and improving the environment in the Virginia Piedmont can take many forms. In addition to gifts of cash or securities, which are most common, you may also be interested in the following opportunities:

- > **Qualified Charitable Deduction (QCD)** — a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian, payable to a qualified charity, such as PEC. QCDs can be counted toward satisfying your required minimum distributions for the year, as long as certain rules are met. Unlike regular withdrawals from an IRA, a QCD excludes the amount donated from your taxable income. You must be at least 70.5 years old to take advantage of the QCD.
- > **In-Kind Gifts** — non-financial gifts that support our organizational strategic goals. Examples of in-kind gifts that PEC might accept include: catering for events; farm equipment; landscaping materials; or items or experiences gifted for special event auctions or to be sold to benefit PEC.
- > **Planned Giving** — including PEC as a beneficiary in your estate plans. This is one of the most meaningful ways you can ensure the long-term stability of conservation in the Virginia Piedmont. Our cherished planned giving donors have the option to join the Bill Backer Legacy Society.
- > **Volunteer** — donating your time and talents. PEC offers a wide range of volunteer opportunities, including planting and harvesting at PEC's Community Farm, participating in citizen science or research projects, special event coordination, photography, administrative support work and more. Check out pecva.org/volunteer for more information on current opportunities.
- > In 2020, a **measure in the federal coronavirus relief bill** grants taxpayers an above-the-line deduction for up to \$300 in charitable donations. The tax break is available to people who claim the standard deduction in their 2020 tax returns.

Welcome 2020 Fellows!

Our 2020 Fellowship program is **going digital** this summer. Ten college students from around the country are participating in our 14th annual PEC Fellowship Program. They will spend seven weeks immersed in everything PEC: land use planning, conservation, agriculture, transportation, historic preservation, water quality and more. We have put together a curriculum complete with guest lectures, reading assignments, individual and group activities, panel discussions and more. During the final three weeks of the program, the fellows will work with each other and PEC staff mentors to complete a practicum project and deliver a final presentation.



Our 7-week Fellowship program runs from June 8 - July 24.

Clio Bate
Smith College
Class of 2021

Savannah Hall
Christopher Newport University
Class of 2021

Trinity Mills
Christopher Newport University
Class of 2020

Gabriella Cresser
Elon University
Class of 2020

Meredith Hickman
Virginia Tech
Class of 2018

Wade Stinson-Ebert
St Olaf College
Class of 2020

Bienvenido (Ben) Fernando
Virginia Tech
Class of 2022

Isabel (Izzy) Lisle
The University of Vermont
Class of 2020

Rebecca Topness
College of William & Mary
Class of 2022

Colin Gates
Virginia Tech
Class of 2020

David Malcolm
University of Florida
Class of 2020

On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

> Comprehensive Plan Updates

This summer, the Albemarle Board of Supervisors will consider how to meet the greenhouse gas reduction goals they approved last October. PEC will highlight how land conservation, smart land use policy, and natural resource protection have been and will continue to be effective tools for keeping our carbon footprint low. We will strive to ensure that Albemarle's Comprehensive Plan continues to demonstrate the value of thoughtful growth management strategies to avoid urban sprawl. We will also analyze carbon-reduction opportunities that may emerge post-Covid-19, such as increased teleworking, and that could be incorporated into the plan.

The City of Charlottesville is in the process of revising its Comprehensive Plan, updating its zoning code and drafting an affordable housing plan. This combined effort is being called Cville Plans Together and will include a series of online sessions for public information and input for the Comprehensive Plan, which will lay the groundwork for revising the zoning map and text in 2021. This combined approach is intended to result in greater harmony between zoning (which describes what can be built) and the community's land-use vision (which is expressed in the Comprehensive Plan).

Government meetings have been taking place via electronic means, and PEC staff have been working to advise citizens on how to participate effectively. We have urged both localities to be mindful that all public decisions, including those related to development and land use, have lasting impacts on the entire community and should be undertaken with maximum transparency. Decisions that cannot be undertaken with full transparency and citizen engagement should be deferred until such time that robust public input is possible.

Clarke

> Story Map Virtual Tour

In March, to celebrate Clarke County and the incredible work being done there, we created a story map virtual tour that highlights many agricultural, historic, natural and scenic spots within the county. It includes photographs, maps and narrative to guide you throughout. You can start the tour and see other Clarke happenings at pecva.org/clarke.

> Upcoming Webinars

The Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance Steering Committee, which PEC helps coordinate, will host two upcoming webinars as part of a speaker series. First, learn about the Blue Ridge and conservation easements during a webinar featuring PEC, the Land Trust of Virginia and other partners on July 8 at 5:30pm. Next, in July or August (exact date TBD), those who want to learn more about regional conservation partnerships are invited to hear from Bill Labich, senior conservationist for the Highstead Foundation and coordinator of the Regional

Conservation Partnership Network. Bill will discuss recognizing the need, establishing operations, taking action, maintaining sustainability of these partnerships and answer questions.

Culpeper

> Land Use Update

In May, the Board of Supervisors approved the rezoning of 31.8 acres along Chestnut Fork Road, from Rural Area (RA) to R-1, which allows for low density residential development. PEC spoke out against this rezoning, as the property was part of a larger tract of RA land, including land with beneficial agricultural soils, and should not be rezoned based on the residential zoning of adjoining properties.

Also in May, the Planning Commission recommended approval of an amendment to the subdivision ordinance, initiated by the Board of Supervisors, that would remove the requirement that subdivision variances be in the public interest. The Board of Supervisors approved the amendment on June 2. PEC spoke out against this amendment, as it removes consistency and transparency from decisions made by the county's elected and appointed officials.

The county's work on its Comprehensive Plan has been delayed by both the recent departure of their principal planner and Covid-19. The finalization date will likely be pushed back to 2021.

> Brandy Station and Cedar Mountain State Park Study

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, which oversees Virginia's state parks, was directed by the General Assembly to complete a feasibility study for the long-discussed state park at Brandy Station and Cedar Mountain battlefields. American Battlefield Trust and the Brandy Station Foundation own over 1,000 acres, and they would convey nearly all of their holdings to the Commonwealth to create a park. The Department of Conservation and Recreation will weigh the management, potential user activities and operation of such a park in Culpeper County and make a recommendation to the legislature by the end of this year.

Fauquier

> Fauquier Farm & Land Conservation

On May 12, PEC's Julian Scheer Fauquier Land Conservation Fund and Fauquier County's Department of Agricultural Development hosted a webinar about the County's Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program and donating conservation easements. The current PDR application round is open through June 30. A recording of the webinar, presentations, and additional information are available on our website at pecva.org/conservation.

> Tree Giveaway

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, PEC joined with Friends of the Rappahannock and

Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission to give away 300 native trees to county residents. Trees were dropped off at participants' homes, allowing people to maintain social distance while making a positive contribution to the environment starting in their own backyards.

> Fauquier County Rezoning and Plan Amendments

Prior to the pandemic, several land use applications were being processed by the county, including multifamily adaptive reuse of the Vint Hill barracks and a zoning text amendment on utility scale solar. Some of these may move forward under the county's new phased approach, but new—and especially controversial—applications may not be accepted for a while. Comprehensive Plan amendments being worked on include the Village Plan, a new Housing chapter, and a new Comprehensive Plan amendment to expand Opal Gateway by 82.5 acres along Avatar Lane. The Town of Warrenton is also updating its Comprehensive Plan, and a draft is expected to come out soon.

Greene

> Growth & Development

Greene County has continued to work on government business throughout the Covid-19 pandemic with many items progressing throughout the summer. In fact, March and April planning and development activity increased over the same period in 2019. We await the 2020 Census to see how closely actual population growth tracks with recent forecasts. The county will conduct a zoning audit this summer; if it is handled poorly, we are concerned it could lead to a push to unnecessarily expand county growth areas.

> Stormwater Runoff Assistance

In Greene County, the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District provides technical and financial assistance to homeowners, businesses and local government to address problems with erosion and poor vegetative cover associated with stormwater runoff. For example, a Greene County landowner used the program to create ponding areas that slowed runoff and minimized downhill erosion and to plant native vegetation to improve ground cover on a steep cut bank. Financial assistance is available through the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) which can reimburse participants up to 75% of the cost of installing conservation practices to address these problems. New funding becomes available July 1, 2020. To request a site visit or more information contact Richard Jacobs at RichardJ@culpeperswcd.org or 540-825-8591.

Loudoun

> Community Farm Update

PEC's Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows is in full swing for the 2020 season. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, we hosted 76 volunteers and engaged

Continued on page 5

with 144 community members. We began harvesting in early April (four months earlier than 2019!) and have donated 1,500 pounds of fresh vegetables to Loudoun Hunger Relief so far. We also partnered with a local orchard to provide 2,000 pounds of apples. While we had to postpone our volunteer opportunities early in the season, we began welcoming volunteers back to the farm in a socially distant manner in mid-June!

› **Zoning Updates and Rural Zoning**

In early May, PEC staff and partner organizations participated in the first round of public input for Loudoun’s zoning ordinance revision. The group identified weaknesses in the current zoning ordinance and recommended stronger environmental protections for subdivision designs, building standards and other planning components. Conservation organizations, including PEC, are discussing various zoning strategies with the Board of Supervisors to reduce the negative environmental impacts caused by Loudoun’s current cluster subdivision ordinance. Achieving the Comprehensive Plan’s vision for the rural area and protecting Loudoun’s prime agricultural soils remain a top priority for PEC.

› **Project Threatens Historic Village**

PEC continues to work with the Friends of St. Louis and community members to advocate for environmental and historic resource protections relating to development and impacts to wetlands on a parcel in the historically African American village of St. Louis. Virginia’s Department of Historic Resources recently agreed with PEC’s nomination to expand the boundaries of the St. Louis Historic District to include the property in question, affirming it is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Madison

› **Potential Communication Tower**

Earlier in the year, County Supervisors approved a communication tower to be located at Graves Mountain Lodge, a proposal submitted by CWS X, LLC. The same company has also completed a balloon test for an additional communication tower just north of the Rapidan River on Route 231, though no application has been submitted to the county to date. PEC has submitted comments to the applicant and DHR, highlighting important historical resources in proximity to the potential tower. Since then, the applicant has reduced the tower’s overall proposed height to 179-feet. PEC continues to advocate for historical viewshed protection, while also recognizing the importance of rural broadband access. We intend to weigh in on any related county process.

› **Conservation & Stewardship**

PEC worked with landowners from two large farms to apply to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for the purchase of agricultural land easements (ALE). If funded, the projects will con-

serve an almost 600-acre farm with over two miles of frontage along the Robinson River and another 450-acre farm with almost a mile of frontage along the Rapidan River.

In other good news, two Madison County landowners planted nine acres and almost 2,000 native trees and shrubs along the Robinson River as part of the Headwater Stream Initiative. Read more about that initiative in the Rappahannock note below.

› **Potential Rural Resort**

A special use permit has been submitted for a 749+ acre rural resort (Crystallis LLC—Crescere Resort) on Route 231, along the Rapidan River. The application will be presented during the June 17 Planning Commission meeting, and is currently scheduled for a joint public hearing before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors in July. The rural resort would be adjacent to multiple conservation easements, the Rapidan River, scenic Route 231 and the Madison Barbour Rural Historic District.

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Orange

› **Land Use Update**

On April 14, the Board of Supervisors adopted its Emergency Ordinance for Continuity of Government Operations and considered an addition to Booster Park (adjacent to the airport). The Supervisors ultimately approved multiple fenced-in play areas for use as a dog park, noting PEC’s support of the project. At its May meeting, the board conducted a joint public hearing with VDOT. The hearing solicited public comment on the county’s proposed road improvements contained in the Secondary Six-Year Plan (Fiscal Years 2021-2026) and the associated construction budget (FY 2021). PEC will continue to monitor and provide comments as necessary.

The Planning Commission held its first meeting since January on May 21, during which a public hearing was held for a special use permit for Mid Atlantic Pyrotechnic Arts Guild (MAPAG)—a private group of firework enthusiasts. Due to the numerous (80+) public comments received, the public hearing was kept open through June 18, allowing more time for comment and for the planning commission to further analyze the application before its decision. Although MAPAG has been operating in Orange for years, PEC expressed our concern that using a single location for recurrent, monthly fireworks testing and display could disturb public health, safety and welfare.

› **Green Streets**

PEC’s Town to Trail working group teamed up with the Friends of the Rappahannock and a local supporter to plant 10 large trees along North Main Street—beginning the restoration of a tree canopy that

once lined this key thoroughfare. The trees were planted at five properties where large trees had died and been removed over the past few years. As they mature, the young trees will help provide cool, clean air for the many folks that walk Gordonsville’s historic district.

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Rappahannock

› **Clean Water, More Trees**

PEC, Friends of the Rappahannock, Virginia Department of Forestry and local Soil and Water Districts partnered for the fourth year on the Headwater Stream Initiative. This free, voluntary initiative provides landowners with technical expertise, materials, and labor for streamside tree plantings in the headwaters of the Rappahannock River watershed. Despite the limitations Covid-19 placed on our ability to use volunteers for this effort, Friends of the Rappahannock staff, landowners, and several private contractors stepped up to plant more than 8,000 trees in Rappahannock. Additionally, new trees planted this spring totaled in 2,875 in Madison, 315 in Orange and 305 in Culpeper counties. Together, these resilient, socially-distant, and careful teams put 11,795 young saplings in the ground just in time for spring rains.

As part of a local effort to monitor waterways in the Hazel River watershed, PEC continues to test three sites along the Rush River—at Harris Hollow Road, Sunnyside Orchard Road and Rappahannock County Park—for the presence of *E. coli* in the water. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality found these waters and parts of the Hazel River watershed to be “impaired” by high bacteria counts from 2008-2019.

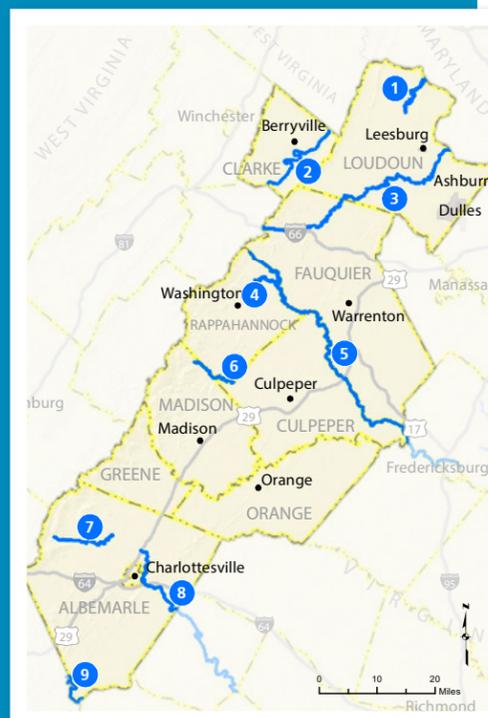
Pop Quiz

QUESTION

This year is the 50th Anniversary of the Virginia Scenic Rivers Program and PEC’s 9-county region is home to 9 such “scenic rivers.” Can you name some of them?

PEC’s region is home to 9 rivers designated as part of the Virginia Scenic Rivers Program.

1. Catoctin Creek
2. Shenandoah River
3. Goose Creek
4. Jordan River
5. Rappahannock River
6. Hughes River
7. Moormans River
8. Rivanna River
9. Rockfish River



Out & About

Digital Edition

While most planned PEC events this spring and summer were canceled due to Covid-19, we have been working hard to create and enhance engagement opportunities online. We have been doing so through webinars, social media, email and video. Here are some of the video highlights from this spring!

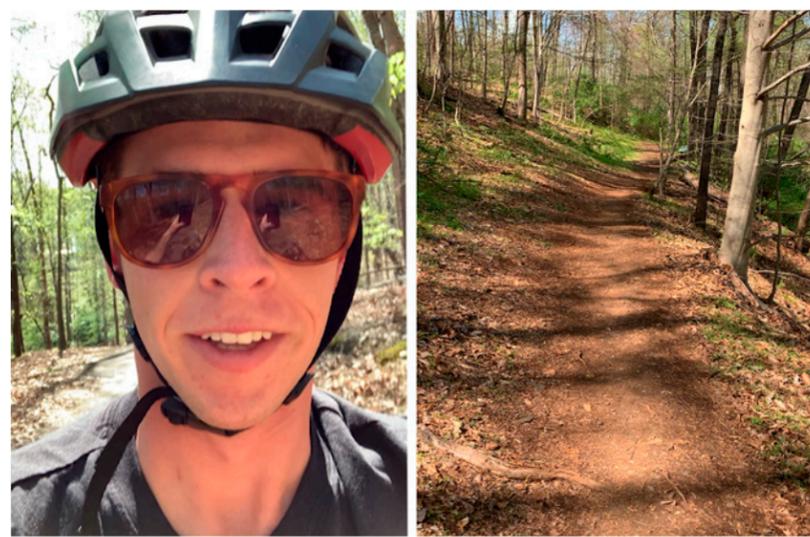
 Find us on Facebook at facebook.com/pecva

 Find us on Instagram @[piedmontenviron](https://instagram.com/piedmontenviron)

 Get email alerts at pecva.org/signup

Fresh Air on Local Trails

APRIL 10, 2020



▲ PEC's Chris Hawk took us with him on a bike ride on some of Charlottesville's many beautiful trails. He showed how important having access to local trails in our neighborhoods is, especially during Covid-19.

Virtual Bluebell Walk

APRIL 10, 2020



▲ PEC's Julian Scheer Fauquier Land Conservation Fund hosts an annual Bluebell Walk. This year, PEC member and event host Margrete Stevens took us on a virtual walk to see the bluebells in bloom along Cedar Run at her farm in Catlett.

Earth Day Tree Giveaway in the Rappahannock River Watershed

APRIL 21, 2020



▲ PEC's Maggi Blomstrom teamed up with Friends of the Rappahannock's Bryan Hofmann to give away 300 trees to Fauquier County residents for Earth Day! It was made possible with grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Earth Day Network, and support from the VA Department of Forestry.

Dr. Drew Lanham Reflects on Earth Day

APRIL 21, 2020



▲ PEC's Kat Imhoff spoke with Dr. J. Drew Lanham, who is a nationally recognized ecologist, poet, author, birder and Professor Emeritus at Clemson University, about the significance of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. We will have Dr. Lanham back with us this coming fall (either in-person or remote) to speak on the subject of nature and culture. Stay tuned for more details!

Happening Now!

Solarize Piedmont

JUNE 15 TO AUGUST 31

A bit delayed...but Solarize Piedmont is back this year for a summer campaign running June 15 – August 31. PEC supporters and area businesses within our service territory can take advantage of competitive rates and financing mechanisms designed specifically for solar energy systems. If you've been thinking about installing solar panels on your home, farm or business, this is your opportunity to find out if it will work for you. Assessments will be conducted remotely. More information at pecva.org/solarize



Watch all of our videos at  www.pecva.org/video

Charlottesville's Drive-Thru Farmers Markets

APRIL 30, 2020



▲ PEC's Chris Hawk took us along with him as he bought some local produce at Charlottesville City Market's drive-thru market, and field representative Sean Tubbs interviewed Local Food Hub's Portia Boggs about the importance of supporting the local food system.

Community Farm Video Updates

SPRING AND SUMMER



▲ Dana Melby and Pete Walton have been hard at work at PEC's Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows, growing food to donate to Loudoun Hunger Relief. They've been keeping us up to date with informative and entertaining video updates!

Larson Native Plant Garden Updates

SPRING AND SUMMER



▲ PEC's Doug Larson has kept all of us at home up to date about how all the native plants are doing at PEC's Larson Native Plant Garden at our office in Warrenton.

Webinar: Open Space & Public Places

MAY 8, 2020



▲ PEC President Chris Miller hosted a webinar about the importance of investing in a distributed network of publicly accessible open spaces and trails.

Webinar: Fauquier Farm & Land Conservation

MAY 12, 2020



▲ PEC's Maggi Blomstrom and Claire Catlett, along with Ray Pickering, Director of Fauquier County's Agricultural Development Department, hosted a webinar for landowners interested in conserving their land and implementing agricultural best management practices.

Preserving Virginia's Historic Metal Truss Bridges

MAY 20, 2020



▲ PEC's Julie Bolthouse discussed our work to preserve the historic metal truss bridges that remain throughout Virginia. These bridges are included in Preservation Virginia's list of Most Endangered Historic Places for 2020.

Out & About Digital Edition

Watch all of our videos at www.pecva.org/video

Dear Friends,

With so much going on around us that we cannot control, doing what we can to make our part of the world better becomes all the more important.

This past spring, our staff made a quick and orderly transition to remote work, operating off a solid platform of online resources, laptops, smartphones, and most importantly, a network of partners and relationships that allow us to be effective observers and active participants in our communities. Continuing full operations, with the support of PEC members and our Board, has provided a remarkable and deeply appreciated source of stability in an otherwise crazy world.

As we move into summer, PEC staff have redoubled our efforts around four key areas that are particularly relevant right now:

- › Investing in local parks, trails and open space
- › Strengthening our local food systems and supply chains
- › Enabling civic engagement and providing civic leadership
- › Acting on conservation opportunities

During the period when Shenandoah National Park and other federal lands were closed for recreation, along with many private facilities, local parks and trails were a critical resource throughout our region. Sky Meadows State Park and PEC's adjacent Piedmont Memorial Overlook have seen visitation increase dramatically. Trails along the John Warner Parkway in Charlottesville and Albemarle have experienced a four-fold increase in use. We are excited to be working on several projects across the region to increase public access to nature and open space. And we will continue pushing for local parks, trails and greenways as a goal of every town and county comprehensive plan, as well as a committed area of local and state investment.

Similarly, the need for fresh, local food has become

even more evident. Food pantries traditionally rely on surplus from supermarkets and restaurants, and many families rely on school lunches and other programs. With many of these sources unavailable due to Covid-19, PEC is responding in a number of ways, including expanding production at our Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows and fundraising to purchase milk produced by local dairies for donation to local food pantries. Long term, our hope is that the network of farms, stores, farm markets and restaurants in the *Buy Fresh Buy Local* network will have an expanded role in food supply for our communities.

Meanwhile, we continue tracking and weighing in on local, regional and state actions that impact the environment and quality of life close to home, like rezoning and land development applications, as well as changes to conservation and restoration programs and funding. In place of in-person meetings and events, our staff have moved swiftly to embrace online platforms to educate, engage and empower Piedmont residents. One example: our recent webinar on Green Infrastructure Options for HOA Common Areas sold out, with 300 registrants, all eager to learn more about what can be done to improve stormwater management in their community.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't address what's happening in our country on the subject of racial equity and justice and the clear need for systemic change.

At PEC, we often say that "the beautiful places we love don't happen by accident;" they take perseverance, careful planning, and conscious prioritizing at every level. Justice and equality for all—though they should be inherent, inalienable and unmistakable—require



The view from above PEC's Piedmont Memorial Overlook. Photo by Hugh Kenny

the same perseverance and thoughtful intent, and they must be incorporated into everything we do.

As an organization whose basic mission is to protect the environment and improve the quality of life for everyone in our region, we haven't done enough to ensure our work is inclusive. We need to closely reexamine the ways in which we address institutional racism and recommit ourselves to listening to and supporting those voices that have been marginalized.

As we said in the statement posted on our website, I truly believe that together, we can shape a better future and build stronger communities that provide equal opportunity for access to nature and a healthy environment. The beauty of the Virginia Piedmont lies not only in our lands, but also in the hearts of our community members, our ability and resolve to come together to empathize and support one another, and our moral fortitude and willingness to stand up for what is right and just.

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President

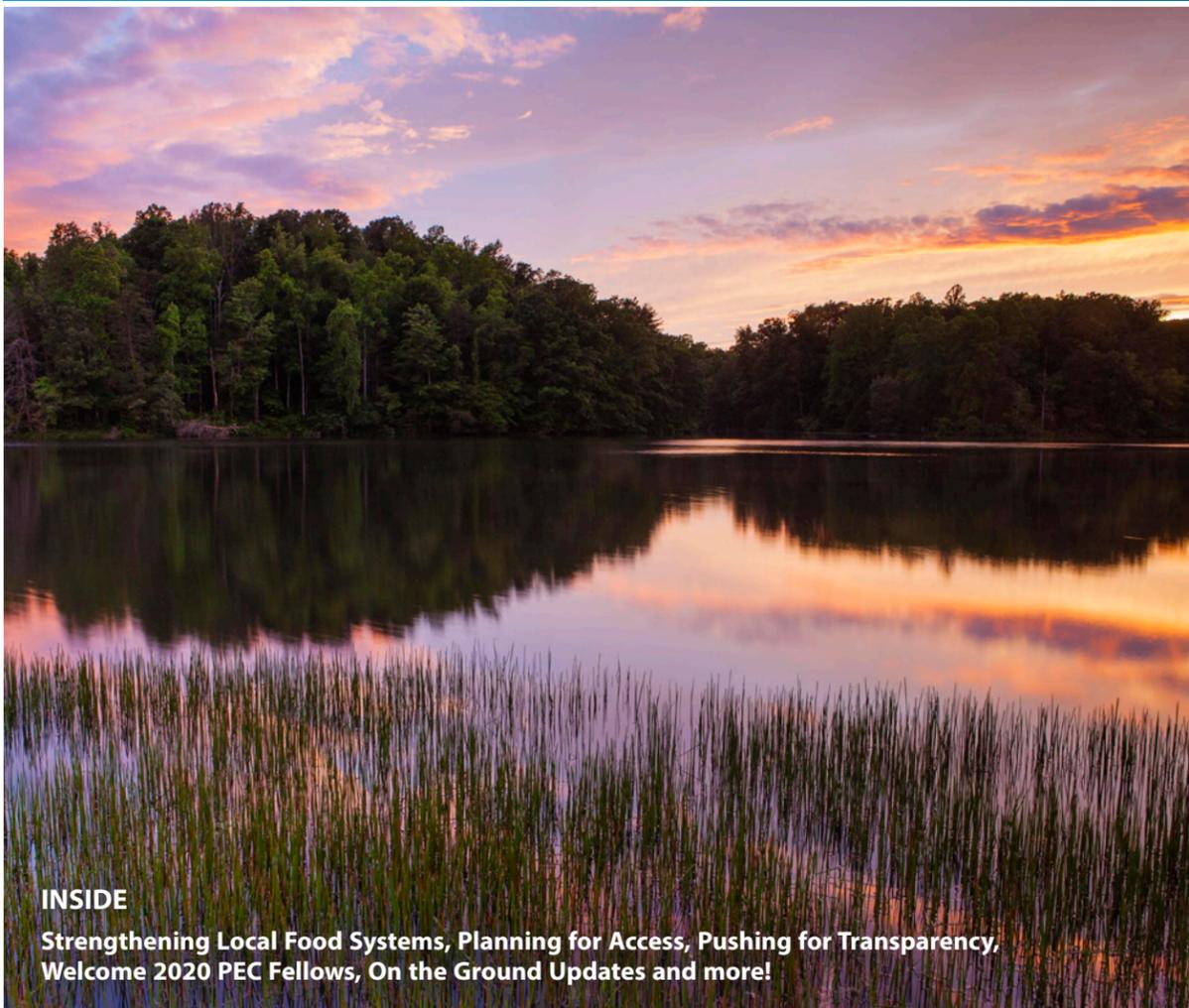


Photo by Matt Ha



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL SUMMER 2020



INSIDE

Strengthening Local Food Systems, Planning for Access, Pushing for Transparency, Welcome 2020 PEC Fellows, On the Ground Updates and more!

Beaver Creek Reservoir at sunset. Photo by Cass Girvin

Pop Quiz

QUESTION:

This year is the 50th Anniversary of the Virginia Scenic Rivers Program and PEC's 9-county region is home to 9 such "scenic rivers." Can you name some of them?

ANSWER ON PAGE 5



Photo by Kat Imhoff



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